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**Kumamoto Japan Representative Office to Relocate to Montana
Department of Commerce Offices**

(HELENA) – The Kumamoto Japan government has announced it will relocate their representative office to space provided by the Montana Department of Commerce located at 301 South Park Avenue in Helena.

“Montana and Kumamoto have a long history of exchanges that have enriched our citizens and communities,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “We look forward to collaborating even more closely to promote the Montana – Kumamoto relationship and move forward Mike Mansfield’s vision of developing regional US-Japan relations.”

The Kumamoto Representative Office is currently operated out of Kumamoto Plaza, a Japanese cultural resource center located on the Helena downtown walking mall. However, due to ongoing budget deficits, the Kumamoto government has decided to close Kumamoto Plaza at the end of March 2008 as a cost savings measure. Despite the closing of the cultural resource center, Kumamoto representative Mr. Kizuku Matsunaga plans to continue to actively promote cultural and business exchanges between the people of Montana and Kumamoto.

“In October 2007, I traveled to several communities in eastern Montana and realized there is a great appreciation for Japanese culture and a friendly feeling towards the people of Kumamoto. I plan to begin conducting more outreach activities to schools, organizations and communities around Montana” said Mr. Matsunaga.

The Kumamoto’s representative office will be co-located with the International Trade & Relations Bureau at the Montana Department of Commerce. Anthony Preite, Director of

the Montana Department of Commerce welcomed the move to the Commerce office building.

“The Montana Department of Commerce is proud to welcome the Kumamoto Representative Office into our International Trade and Relations Bureau,” said Director Preite. “This is a unique opportunity to continue building our cultural partnership and working relationship with Mr. Matsunaga and the people of Kumamoto.”

Mr. Matsunaga is planning two final events at the Kumamoto Plaza in Helena. On Sunday, March 2nd the Plaza will feature a Hina Doll Festival. An office relocation reception open to the general public will be held Friday, March 14th and will feature music and dance performers from Kumamoto.

“We want to express our gratitude to our Montana friends who have actively supported Kumamoto Plaza and our downtown neighbors” said Matsunaga.

At the urging of then US Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield, the State of Montana and Kumamoto Prefecture signed a sister-state agreement in 1982 to promote the creative exchange of people, ideas and culture. Over the past 25 years hundreds of high school students have participated in exchange programs and citizens of both regions have enjoyed a diverse number of exchanges which have included music, sports, disabled persons, business, performing and visual arts, and traditional festivals.

Kumamoto began dispatching a representative to Montana in 1985 and the representative’s office was initially located at the Montana Department of Commerce prior to the opening of Kumamoto Plaza in 1992. In 1990, the State of Montana opened a representative office in Kumamoto, which continues today to be operated out of Kumamoto government offices.

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